

"I hope my favorite teams win on Saturday and Sunday." "I hope it doesn't snow." When I say "I hope," that means I'm optimistic about a good outcome. But there's no certainty, is there? Sure, I wish my favorite teams would win, but they could lose and often do. And it has snowed and will snow.

Now when the Bible uses the word "hope," it's so much bigger and stronger than being optimistic, because it's connected to the promises of God, promises that can't be broken.

Optimism is a wish for a good outcome. But as Christians, we have something better than optimism, we have hope, a guarantee – because it's attached to the shatterproof promises of God.

There's a math equation that clearly states today's Biblical truth. And even if you aren't a math whiz, you can understand this:

"Hope > Optimism ... Every Day!"

In the chapters leading up to Luke 21, Jesus had been spending a lot of time at the temple. His disciples always admired the temple's beauty. But Jesus warned them that one day their beloved temple would be destroyed, along with the city of Jerusalem. Jesus wasn't trying to crush their dreams, he was making them and us aware of an even greater destruction still to come – the end of this world. (In case you're wondering - in 70 AD, the Romans destroyed the temple and leveled Jerusalem.)

In the verses just before our text Jesus identifies some "signs" or indicators of the end of world: **"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven."** Those things were all occurring at the time Jesus spoke these words.

Some interesting studies have revealed that America has been involved in some sort of war or

conflict for 95% of our country's 242 years. That's all but 12 years. Speaking worldwide, there's *never* been a year where nations didn't rise against nations. There's *never* been a year without natural disasters.

Jesus' point? The end of the world is coming and so is Jesus. It could happen at any moment. In today's lesson, Jesus lists some additional indicators signs in the skies - **the sun, moon and stars and the heavenly bodies will be shaken** signs involving countries - **nations will be in anguish and perplexity** signs involving individuals - **people will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.**

Jesus' combined lists of "signs" is terrifying. Things that have remained constant since God put the sun, moon and stars in the heavens will shake and rattle. Famines and pestilence will hit this planet while it shakes and rattles. Angry nations fight each other and people won't be able to cope with everything going on.

While these events may terrify some, they have the opposite effect on others. For the believer, these signs are comforting, reassuring. They point - not to an end, but to a beginning of our deliverance from sin, death and Satan once and for all. They point - not to destruction, but to the finished construction of our heavenly mansion.

No wonder Jesus urges us, as his disciples, don't hide, **stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. Your Savior is coming** to tuck you safely in his arms and carry you home.

To erase any doubt, he uses his favorite teaching tool – the parable. This one is about a fig tree. **When a fig tree sprouts leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.** Just like budding leaves let the farmer know that summer is close, so these signs let us know that Jesus' second coming is also close. At any moment, we could see stars fall, oceans drain and Jesus'

return in glory.

Do we live as though the end could be any moment? Jesus sounds the alarm: **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life."**

A major cause of anxiety is not seeing a way out of something.

Some use partying and overdrinking in an attempt to escape anxiety, while others think happiness comes by disregarding and ignoring God's rules. The end result is the same. A person's heart is burdened by their guilt and fear. And, there will come a day of reckoning.

The Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory is the one who brings that day and the one with whom the reckoning will take place. This time, unlike his first coming, Christ won't be weak like a baby. He won't be meek either, and allow himself to be beaten, battered and crucified. He will make full-use of the power he set aside to the delight of believers and the devastation of unbelievers.

With all those "sign" around us. With all that's going on in our daily lives like: schedules, meals, work, chores, difficult and painful situations, we can still have hope because of Jesus' promise: **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

Secure and permanent things like heaven and earth will pass away. But everything God has promised in his Word, and everything Jesus has said in his Word won't. That's why we can have hope. And Hope > Optimism ... Every day! And we need it every day!

Are you living every day with the expectation that this could be the day? Have you let worldly living and anxiety interfere with or even rule your lives? Jesus has this to say about those sins: **"It is finished."** Our complete and total debt of sin has been stamped: *"Paid in Full."* Those sweet words of pardon and forgiveness will never pass away.

There's a huge gap, an enormous gap between those who have hope in Christ and those who don't. That's evident by their reactions to Judgment Day and their responses on Judgment Day. Those who lack faith in Jesus, who have no hope in him or his promises, face a day of sheer terror. They're looking for a place to hide, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when God came looking after they sinned.

For those who trust Jesus, it's a different story. Believers, those who have hope, won't be hiding, we'll be **"standing up and lifting up our heads."** Believers will watch the fireworks without an ounce of fear. Why? Our redemption & eternal salvation has arrived, as promised.

Jesus gives us, as believers, a couple of things we can do as we live in between Jesus' first and second comings.

1 - Be careful! Be conscious of the temptations that are a challenge for you - avoid them. Be conscious of your constant need to be strengthened by Word and Sacrament. Don't neglect the very thing that sustains and maintains your faith.

2 - Be alert! Don't fall asleep at the wheel. Live with the expectation, *"Jesus could return any time."* Don't let the passing of days, weeks, months and years lull you to sleep. It could be today!

3 - Pray! Talk to God often. That's a really good way to remain careful and alert so you'll be ready to stand before the Son of Man.

Advent is a time to look back and stare at the Savior in the manger. But, as God's people, it's also a time to look ahead to our Savior's return.

- We look ahead during worship - through the words and music of our liturgy and hymns, we proclaim God reigns in our lives.
- We look ahead during Communion - proclaiming Jesus' death until he returns, and previewing our feast of victory with him.

- We look ahead during each day - serving our Savior as we serve others and invite them to know the hope we have.

It's good to be optimistic, but favorite teams can and do lose. Snow can and does fall.

So, when so much is at stake – the eternal destination of your soul and mine, we need more than optimism. We need certainty. We need a guarantee. And through Jesus we have that. You know the equation: **“Hope > Optimism ... Every Day!”**